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March 1, 1999

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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Hon. Magalie Roman Salas
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

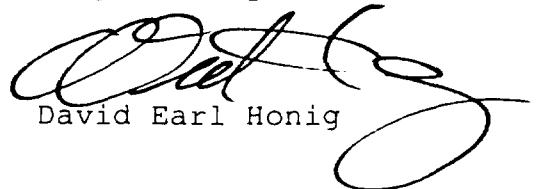
Dear Ms. Salas:

RE: MM Dockets 98-204 and 96-16
(Broadcast and Cable EEO)

Transmitted herewith is the Statement of Randall Pinkston. Mr. Pinkston's Statement is an exhibit to the Comments of the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ et al. ("UCC"), which are being filed separately this date. Please associate Mr. Pinkston's Statement with the UCC's Comments, and refer any communications to UCC's counsel:

Shelby D. Green, Esq.
c/o Pace University School of Law
78 No. Broadway
White Plains, NY 10603
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Respectfully submitted,


David Earl Honig

Attachment

cc: Judy Boley
FCC
445 12th St. S.W., Room C-1804
Washington, D.C. 20554

Timothy Fain
OMB Desk Officer
10236 NEOB, 725 17th St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

/dh

STATEMENT OF RANDALL PINKSTON

My name is Randall Pinkston. For the past nineteen years, I have been employed by CBS, first as a correspondent for the flagship station, WCBS-TV, and now as a correspondent for CBS NEWS. I am based in New York and contribute to various newscasts, including WEEKEND NEWS, MORNING NEWS and SUNDAY MORNING.

Previously, I have worked as an anchor, producer, and reporter at stations in Hartford, Connecticut (1976-80), Jacksonville, Florida (1974-76), and Jackson, Mississippi (1969-74). This profession has taken me to places throughout the world, allowed me to meet presidents and prime ministers, actors, scientists and legends of sports. It's also afforded me the opportunity to be a conduit of information for people in need of help. I have counted it a privilege to be able to allow the downtrodden to tell their stories, too. This wonderful career began at WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi, a small station, in a relatively small city, the last place that anyone would expect to lead a revolution in broadcasting.

I grew up in Jackson, attended public schools, went to church, received love and discipline from my parents and an extended circle of relatives, teachers and neighbors. Until I was around eleven years old, we had no television set and one radio. My parents controlled the radio and loved listening to the news. As near as I can determine, that was the beginning of my interest in journalism.

By the time I enrolled in junior high school, our family had joined the modern age and obtained a television set. We watched the network news (it came on first) and then the local news. It was the era of the civil rights movement: the freedom rides, lunch counter sit-ins, the fire hoses and dogs set loose on protestors. I began to notice that network newscasts' treatment of an event was often very different from local coverage of the same story. While network reports, for example, would refer to protestors as 'civil rights demonstrators', the local anchors would faithfully quote local officials who called protestors "outside agitators". Thank God for the outside agitation.

What I did not know at the time was that those of us who were dependent on Jackson's two local t.v. stations were missing a world of news. I did not know that the local stations routinely refused to transmit program excerpts which portrayed African-Americans. This rule even extended to entertainment programs. We never saw the short-lived Nat King Cole show, or any reports provided by ABC NEWS Correspondent Malvin Goode, the first African-American to appear regularly on a network newscast.

But change was all around. Thanks to the bravery and dedication of a group of Mississippians and Reverend Everett Parker of the United Church of Christ Office of Communications, the license for WLBT was challenged. In a last-ditch effort to keep it, the owners and management of WLBT launched a job-outreach program, possibly one of the first in the nation for broadcasters, to hire African-Americans. I was about to become part of the change.

I had briefly attended Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. While there, I held an extracurricular job as a D.J. on Wesleyan's FM station. When my father became ill and died, I returned home to Jackson to attend college and look for part-time employment. Knowing of my radio experience at Wesleyan, our minister sent me to apply for a job as a news trainee at WLBT-TV.

After some protest to our minister, telling him what he already knew- that I had no journalism experience, I applied at WLBT. Without the outreach effort, I never would have applied for the job. Growing up in Mississippi, never seeing any blacks as full-time newscasters, I had no inclination to believe any station in Mississippi would hire me. I was interviewed by Dave Micher, the newly-hired (post-license challenge) news director. He had earned his degree in journalism at the University of Illinois. Micher quickly began turning around the news room's operation and, ultimately, its reputation.

It was Dave who concluded that a skinny 19-year old kid had potential as a reporter. He also hired a college drop-out named Corrice Collins as the full-time trainee. Collins later earned a master's degree in journalism. Dave hired an auto-mechanic as a photographer, and two former business managers as news trainees. One of those trainees, Walter Saddler would become News Director of WLBT-TV. When he left WLBT, Saddler took over news operations at the competitor station, WJTV-TV.

Micher encouraged all of us to cover stories about the community. The station took seriously its mission to serve in the "public interest, convenience and necessity". One veteran correspondent did an award-winning documentary on housing: I was allowed to spend time at the Choctaw Indian Reservation outside Philadelphia, Mississippi. Some of the tribal leaders there later told me that none of the Jackson stations had ever done a story about them before.

We did stories about community projects and politics, including Charles yEvers' historic run for governor. I covered the mayoralty campaign of a community activist in Bolton, Mississippi. Bennie Thompson won that contest and went on to become a member of Congress.

In those early years, given Mississippi's racial history, and the charged climate surrounding the inclusion of blacks at WLBT, one might have expected a hostile reception, if not from long-time employees, certainly from viewers. In fact, several of the long-time Caucasian employees (Dave Micher, Hewitt Griffin, Howard Lett, Ed Hopgood, Tom Roane) became my mentors. During my entire tenure at WJDX-FM & AM, and later at WLBT-TV, I never received one hateful phone call or article of mail. Mississippi listeners and viewers accepted me and my colleagues the same way they had accepted other youngsters who were starting out.

For me, the ultimate proof occurred in the ratings book of February 1974. Six months earlier, I had been promoted to anchor the 6PM report, the main newscast. By then, I was a familiar face at WLBT, having anchored the weekend and later the 10PM newscasts. Still, no African-American had ever been the 'main anchor' at any station in Mississippi or, for that matter, at few

stations in America. The general manager, among others, had expected that my appointment to that critical newscast would result in a loss of viewers.

In 1974, Nielsen 'diaries' were not widely distributed in the homes of African-Americans. So, the ratings were, arguably, an indication of the acceptability of a black person as a news presenter, as someone Caucasian-Americans, specifically, white Mississippians would 'invite' into their homes each night. In February, 1974, WLBT's 6PM REPORT received its highest rating ever.

When I left WLBT, I was replaced by another African-American man, Walter Saddler. When the format was changed to include a co-anchor, a black man was paired with a white woman. Since 1973, WLBT has always had an African-American male as the 6PM anchor or co-anchor. Other African-Americans were hired in programming, engineering, sales, graphic design, and administration.

Today, an African-American man is the principal owner and CEO. Throughout it all, WLBT-TV remained the number one station in Mississippi. And, I'm told it has always been profitable.

It is an incredible legacy of affirmative action, a testament to what can be accomplished when people of goodwill come together. WLBT is also a living lesson to any broadcast manager who has any doubt that viewers will accept people of color in highly visible roles of authority.

Randall Pinkston
CORRESPONDENT, CBS NEWS
WLBT-TV EMPLOYEE 1969-74

25 February 1999